

Iraqi Students Get a Second Chance

Accelerated Learning Program February 2004

During Saddam Hussein's rule, many children dropped out of school because they could not afford bribes, had to support their families, or were punished harshly. Many Iraqi children have missed valuable years of school, lack basic skills, and are so far behind that they could not return to school.

USAID's Accelerated Learning Program gives these children a second chance at education. Through its five pilot programs throughout Iraq, more than 600 students have returned to the classroom and are catching up with their peers. Part of USAID's Education Revitalization Program, Accelerated Learning promotes enrollment and retention in the Iraqi school system, contributing to democracy, equality, and economic growth and improving the quality of life of Iraqi families.

The Purpose

During its first year (August 2003–June 2004), the Accelerated Learning Program has initiated pilot interventions that will lay the foundation for Iraqi children to return to school. Its five locations throughout Iraq enrolled out-of-school children aged 6-14 years and employ different methods and materials to accelerate children through the equivalent of two years of schooling in only one school year.

The Approach

Accelerated Learning is a program of study that can be formal or informal, individual or collective, and incorporates a variety of educational methods relevant to each of the students needs. In Iraq, the project aims to re-engage out-of-school children in mainstream education by attending a program that compresses two years of the national curriculum compressed into one school year.

The program uses a series of practical approaches to learning with the expectation that, when properly motivated and effectively taught, every student can achieve at a level that may currently seem beyond their reach. It provides a breadth of proven, life-long learning skills based on a variety of teaching styles and an understanding of how students learn.



Above: Students celebrate a well-earned two-week school vacation after extensive oral and written mid-year exams. USAID Photo

The 2003/04 Accelerated Learning Program consists of...

- ...644 students and 55 teachers countrywide.
- ...100-150 students in each location taking 4-6 classes, with 2-3 teachers in each class.
- ...Grades 1/2, 3/4, 5/6, and 7/8.
- ...A master trainer in each location to assist a team of 8-14 teachers.
- ...A community outreach worker in each location to encourage attendance and prevent drop-outs.



Mohammed Sabah, 14, is a student in grade 1/2 of the Baghdad Accelerated Learning Program. He has been working since he was 12, when he was forced to quit school because his family couldn't afford to pay

bribes to teachers. Mohammed said he would get high marks on every test but would still fail his classes because he couldn't pay the teachers. Mohammed's goal while in the Accelerated Learning Program is to learn to read and write. He said, "I am very happy in this school and I will be even happier if I can spend my whole life in this school."



Mohammed Adil, 10, quit school two years ago because his teachers and principal hit him when he didn't know the answers. Now a student in Accelerated Learning grade 1/2, he likes the teachers. Mohammed

makes 1,000 dinars (50 cents) a day for his family selling bananas in Kadhamiyah before and after school. "I love being in school now. I want to finish my studies and become a teacher."

Amira Edan is the smallest student in the Accelerated Learning Program in Baghdad. Though ten years old, Amira looks half her age. When asked why she left school, she

said, "I'm small. I'm too small." Amira's mother explained that the principal of a previous school forced her to leave because she

was undersized. "My girl was not allowed to learn because of her size," said Amira's mother, "When I heard of this new school, I came here with Amira, but there was no class for her. Then, miraculously, one day a teacher said there was a new class and I was so happy." Amira likes the Accelerated Learning Program and her favorite subjects are math and Arabic. "I want to be a teacher when I grow tall," she said.



The Program

Determining the Need. A total of 4,541 out-of-school kids in Baghdad, Diwaniyah, Karbala, Nasiriyah, and Arbil were surveyed to determine target groups, grade levels, and demand. When asked what they disliked most about school, both boys and girls said physical punishment and bad treatment by the teachers.

Compressing the Syllabus. To ensure that the program is delivered using well-designed, relevant lessons and activities, the syllabus compression booklet was locally produced to integrate two years of the national curriculum's key topics and concepts into one year of classes. Special-purpose teaching materials, such as charts and maps, are developed as needed.

Training the Teachers. Teaching in Iraq had been based on rote memorization, and teachers had little or no training in modern techniques. Accelerated Learning focuses on upgrading teachers' skills and methodological knowledge through pre-service education—the beginning of a gradual process of change and learning for the newly recruited teachers. The program will conduct continuous in-service training and mentoring based on individual or team needs, and throughout the first year teachers are being trained in both a central location and in their regional localities.



The teachers at Azhar Khudayr Abdul Sadih's school used to hit her, so she stopped attending and stayed home to help her mother take care of her two brothers. This year, she returned to school in the grade 1/2 Accelerated Learning Program. Twelve-year-old Azhar says that she loves school now because the teachers

do not hit her. Now she wants to finish her studies, go to college, and become a doctor. "I will be a good doctor and treat my patients with kindness and not hurt them...I like going to school so that when I am older I can help many people."

